Benjamin B. Warfield

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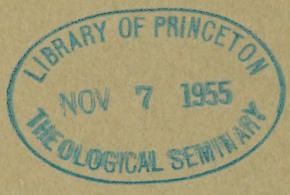

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Benjamin B. Warfield

THE MILLENNIUM AND THE APOCALYPSE.*

OF the section of the Apocalypse which extends (according to his division of the book) from xx. 1 to xxi. 8, Klieforth remarks, as he approaches its study, that "because the so-called millennium is included in its compass, it has been more than any other part of the book tortured by tendency-exposition into a variety of divergent senses."† This is undoubtedly true: but in reprobating it, we must not permit ourselves to forget that there is a sense in which it is proper to permit our understanding of so obscure a portion of Scripture to be affected by the clearer teaching of its more didactic parts. We must guard, no doubt, against carrying this too far and doing violence to the text before us in the interests of Bible-harmony. But within due limits, surely, the order of investigation should be from the clearer to the more obscure. And it is to be feared that there has been much less tendency-interpretation of Rev. xx in the interest of preconceived theory, than there has been tendency-interpretation of the rest of Scripture in the interest of conceptions derived from misunderstandings of this obscure passage.

Nothing, indeed, seems to have been more common in all ages of the Church than to frame an eschatological scheme from this passage, imperfectly understood, and then to impose this scheme on the rest of Scripture *vi et armis*. To realize this, we have but to recall the manifold influences which have wrought not only on eschatological dreaming, but on theological thought and on Christian life itself, out of the conception summed up in the term "the millennium." Yet not only the word, but, as Klieforth has himself solidly shown,‡ the thing, is unknown to Scripture outside of this passage.§ And not only so, but there are not a few passages of

* A Lecture.

† *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 1874, III, 254.

‡ *Christliche Eschatologie*, 1886, pp. 183 *sq*.

§ "Once and once, only," says the *Encyc. Bibl.*, 3095, "in the New Testament we hear of a millennium." "'The doctrine of the Millennium is set forth in the New Testament in clear terms only in Revelation, where it constitutes the most easily recognizable dogmatic peculiarity' (Holtzmann, *Handkom.*, IV, 319)"—

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Scripture—as Klieforth also has shown*—which seem definitely to exclude the whole conception, and which must be subjected to most unnatural exegetical manipulation to bring them into harmony with it at all. We need not raise the question whether Scripture can contradict Scripture: in our day, certainly, there is no lack of expositors who would feel little difficulty in expounding the eschatology of Revelation as definitely the *antipodes* of that, say, of Paul, not to say the eschatology of one section of Revelation as the precise contradictory of that of another. But surely, for those who look upon the Bible as something other than the chance driftage of the earliest age of Christianity, it is at least undesirable to assume such an antagonism beforehand; and on the emergence of apparent inconsistencies it certainly becomes in the first instance incumbent upon us to review our expositions under the impulse of at least the possibility that they may prove to be in error. We shall not proceed far in such an undertaking, as it seems to us, before we discover that the traditional interpretation of Revelation which yields the notion of a "millennium" is at fault; and that this book, when taken in its natural and self-indicated sense, needs no harmonizing with the eschatology of the rest of the New Testament, for the simple reason that its eschatology is precisely the same with that of its companion books.

In order to make this good, it will not be necessary to do more than pass in rapid review the series of visions which constitute the particular section of the Apocalypse of which the millennium-passage forms a part. The structure of the book, made up as it is of seven parallel sections,† repeating with progressive clearness, fullness and richness the whole history of the inter-adventual period, and thus advancing in a spiral fashion to its climax, renders it possible to do this without drawing too much on a knowledge of the whole

W. A. Brown, in Hastings' *Bible Dict.*, III, 371. The period of 1000 years seems to be applied to such a conception first in the Slavonic *Book of the Secrets of Enoch*, 33 : 1, 2 (see *Encyc. Bib.*, 1368; Hastings, I, 711*a*, III, 371*a*) which is dated by Charles in the first half of the first century. It is there based on the idea of a Sabbatical week: as the world was created in six days followed by a day of rest, so the world will last 6000 years followed by 1000 years of rest. The same idea seems to underlie Barnabas, c. 15, though Dr. Salmon, *Christian Doct. of Immort.*, 1895, p. 438, does not think so. Cf. Gebhardt, *The Doctrine of the Apocalypse*, E. T., pp. 277–8.

* *Ibid.*, pp. 187–8. Cf. Milligan, *Baird Lectures on the Revelation of St. John*, 1886, pp. 205 *sq.*; and *Expositor's Bible: The Book of Revelation*, 1889, pp. 345 *sq.*

† The plan of the book is, then, something like the following: Prologue, I : 1–8; seven parallel sections divided at III : 22, VIII : 1, XI : 19, XIV : 20, XVI : 21 and XIX : 20; Epilogue, XXII : 6–21. The subdivisions of the several sections follow, each, its own course.

book. We have only to bear clearly in mind a few primary principles, apart from which no portion of the book can be understood, and we need not despair of unlocking the secrets of this section also.

These primary principles are, with the greatest possible brevity, the following: 1. The principle of *recapitulation.** That is to say, the structure of the book is such that it returns at the opening of each of its seven sections to the first advent, and gives in the course of each section a picture of the whole inter-adventual period—each successive portraiture, however, rising above the previous one in the stress laid on the issue of the history being wrought out during its course. The present section, being the last, reaches, therefore, the climax, and all its emphasis is thrown upon the triumph of Christ's kingdom. 2. The principle of *successive visions.* That is to say, the several visions following one another within the limits of each section, though bound to each other by innumerable links, yet are presented as separate visions, and are to be interpreted, each, as a complete picture in itself. 3. The principle of *symbolism.* That is to say—as is implied, indeed, in the simple fact that we are brought face to face here with a series of visions significant of events—we are to bear continually in mind that the whole fabric of the book is compact of symbols. The descriptions are descriptions not of the real occurrences themselves, but of symbols of the real occurrences; and are to be read strictly as such. Even more than in the case of parables, we are to avoid pressing details in our interpretation of symbols: most of the details are details of the symbol, designed purely to bring the symbol sharply and strongly before the mind's eye, and are not to be transferred by any method of interpretation whatever directly to the thing symbolized. The symbol as a whole symbolizes the real event: and the details of the picture belong primarily only to the symbol. Of course, now and then a hint is thrown out which may seem more or less to traverse this general rule: but, as a general rule, it is not only sound but absolutely necessary for any sane interpretation of the book. 4. The principle of *ethical purpose.* That is to say, here as in all prophecy it is the spiritual and ethical impression that rules the presentation and not an annalistic or chronological intent. The purpose of the seer is to make known indeed—to make wise—but not for knowledge's own sake, but for a further end: to make known unto action,

* This principle of *recapitulatio* was announced by Augustine, and perfected by Nicholas Collado (1584) and David Pareus (1618), and especially by Cocceius and Vitringa. A very large number of expositors have employed its fundamental principle, as, among later ones, for instance, Hofmann, Hengstenberg, Ebrard, Kienlen; but with varying degrees of judiciousness.

to make wise unto salvation. He contents himself, therefore, with what is efficacious for his spiritual end and never loses himself in details which can have no other object than the satisfaction of the curiosity of the mind for historical or other knowledge.

One of the effects of the recognition of these primary principles—an effect the perception of which is no more interesting in itself than fruitful for the interpretation of the book—is the transference of the task of the interpreter from the region of minute philology to that of broad literary appreciation. The ascertainment of the meaning of the Apocalypse is a task, that is to say, not directly of verbal criticism but of sympathetic imagination: the teaching of the book lies not immediately in its words, but in the wide vistas its visions open to the fancy. It is the seeing eye, here, therefore, rather than the nice scales of linguistic science, that is needful more obviously than in most sections of Scripture.

If, now, we approach the study of the section at present before us under the guidance of these principles, it is probable that we shall not find it impossible to follow at least its main drift.

The section opens with a vision of the victory of the Word of God, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords over all His enemies. We see Him come forth from heaven girt for war, followed by the armies of heaven; the birds of the air are summoned to the feast of corpses that shall be prepared for them: the armies of the enemy —the beasts and the kings of the earth—are gathered against Him and are totally destroyed; and "all the birds are filled with their flesh" (xix. 11–21). It is a vivid picture of a complete victory, an entire conquest, that we have here; and all the imagery of war and battle is employed to give it life. This is the symbol. The thing symbolized is obviously the complete victory of the Son of God over all the hosts of wickedness. Only a single hint of this signification is afforded by the language of the description, but that is enough. On two occasions we are carefully told that the sword by which the victory is won proceeds *out of the mouth* of the conqueror (verses 15 and 21). We are not to think, as we read, of any literal war or manual fighting, therefore; the conquest is wrought by the spoken word—in short, by the preaching of the Gospel. In fine, we have before us here a picture of the victorious career of the Gospel of Christ in the world. All the imagery of the dread battle and its hideous details are but to give us the impression of the completeness of the victory. Christ's Gospel is to conquer the earth: He is to overcome all His enemies.

There is, of course, nothing new in this. The victory of the Gospel was predicted over and over again even in Old Testament times under the figure of a spiritual conquest. It is thus also that Paul pictures it. It is thus that John himself elsewhere portrays it: it is indeed the staple representation of this whole book. In particular we perceive that this splendid vision is, after all, only the expansion of the parallel vision given in the second verse of the sixth chapter. When the first seal was opened, "And I saw," says the seer, "and, behold, a white horse, and he that sat thereon had a bow; and there was given unto him a crown: and he came forth conquering, and to conquer." It is the same scene that is now before us, only strengthened and made more emphatic as befits its place near the end of the book. We recall now the principle of "recapitulation" which governs the structure of the book, and see that this first vision of the last section, in accordance with the general method of the book, returns to the beginning and portrays for us, as vi. 2 and xii. 1 do, the first coming of the Lord and the purpose and now, with more detail and stress, the issue of this coming. What we have here, in effect, is a picture of the whole period between the first and second advents, seen from the point of view of heaven. It is the period of the advancing victory of the Son of God over the world, emphasizing, in harmony with its place at the end of the book, the completeness of the victory. It is the eleventh chapter of Romans and the fifteenth of 1 Corinthians in symbolical form: and there is nothing in it that was not already in them—except that, perhaps, the completeness of the triumph of the Gospel is possibly somewhat more emphasized here.

With the opening of the twentieth chapter the scene changes (xx. 1–10). Here we are not smitten in the face with the flame and flare of war: it is a spectacle of utter peace rather that is presented to us. The peace is, however, it must be observed, thrown up against a background of war. The vision opens with a picture of the descent of an angel out of heaven who binds "the dragon, the old serpent, which is the Devil and Satan," for a thousand years. Then we see the saints of God reigning with their Lord, and we are invited to contemplate the blessedness of their estate. But when Satan is bound we are significantly told that after the thousand years "he must be loosed for a little time." The saints themselves, moreover, we are informed, have not attained their exaltation and blessedness save through tribulation. They have all passed through the stress of this beast-beset life—have all been "beheaded" for the

testimony of Jesus. And at the end we learn of the renewed activity of Satan and his final destruction by fire out of heaven.

This thousand-year peace that is set before us is therefore a peace hedged around with war. It was won by war; the participants in it have come to it through war; it ends in war. What now is this thousand-year peace? It is certainly not what we have come traditionally to understand by the "millennium," as is made evident by many considerations, and sufficiently so by this one: that those who participate in it are spoken of as mere "souls" (ver. 4)—"the souls of them that had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the Word of God." It is not disembodied souls who are to constitute the Church during its state of highest development on earth, when the knowledge of the glory of God covers the earth as the waters cover the sea. Neither is it disembodied souls who are thought of as constituting the kingdom which Christ is intending to set up in the earth after His advent, that they may rule with Him over the nations. And when we have said this, we are surely following hard on the pathway that leads to the true understanding of the vision. The vision, in one word, is a vision of the peace of those who have died in the Lord; and its message to us is embodied in the words of xiv. 13: "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord, from henceforth"—of which passage the present is indeed only an expansion.

The picture that is brought before us here is, in fine, the picture of the "intermediate state"—of the saints of God gathered in heaven away from the confused noise and garments bathed in blood that characterize the war upon earth, in order that they may securely await the end.* The thousand years, thus, is the whole of this present dispensation, which again is placed before us in its entirety, but looked at now relatively not to what is passing on earth but to what is enjoyed "in Paradise." This, in fact, is the meaning of the symbol of a thousand years. For, this period between the advents is, on earth, a broken time—three and a half years, a "little time" (ver. 3)†—which, amid tur-

* So far L. Kraussold (*Das tausendjährige Reich*, u.s.w., 1863) is right: "The souls of the righteous live before God and with God—that is their first resurrection." But though he thus correctly interprets the "first resurrection" of the intermediate state, he does not see that the "millennium" is the intermediate period.

† Cf. Milligan, *Baird Lectures*, pp. 213–214; *Expositor's Bible*, pp. 340–1. The *term* 'three and a half years' does not occur in the Apocalypse, but its equivalents forty-two months (xi. 2, xiii. 5) and 1260 days (xi. 3, xii. 6) do, as well as the corresponding phrase "a time and times and half a time" (xii. 14), which is derived of course from Daniel vii. 25, xii. 7. All these designations alike "express the whole time of the Church's militant and suffering condition in the world, the

moil and trouble, the saints are encouraged to look upon as of short duration, soon to be over. To the saints in bliss it is, on the contrary, a long and blessed period passing slowly and peacefully by, while they reign with Christ and enjoy the blessedness of holy communion with Him—"a thousand years."*

Of course the passage (xx. 1–10) does not give us a direct description of "the intermediate state." We must bear in mind that the book we are reading is written in symbols and gives us a direct description of nothing that it sets before us, but always a direct description only of the symbol by which it is represented. In the preceding vision (xix. 11–21) we had no direct description of the triumph and progress of the Gospel, but only of a fierce and gruesome war: the single phrase that spoke of the slaying sword as "proceeding out of the mouth" of the conqueror alone indicated that it was a conquest by means of persuading words. So here we are not to expect a direct description of the "intermediate state": were such a description given, that would be evidence enough that the intermediate state was not intended, but was rather the symbol of something else. The single hint that it is of the condition of the "souls" of those who have died in Christ and for Christ that the seer is speaking, is enough here to direct our thoughts in the right direction. What is described, or rather, to speak more exactly—for it is a course of events that is brought before us—what is narrated to us is the chaining of Satan "that he should deceive the nations no more"; the consequent security and glory of Christ's hitherto persecuted people; and the subsequent destruction of Satan. It is a description in the form of a narrative: the element of time and chronological succession belongs to the symbol, not to the thing symbolized. The "binding of Satan" is, therefore, in reality, not for a season, but with reference to a sphere; and his "loosing" again is not after a period but in another sphere: it is not subsequence but exteriority that is suggested. There is, indeed, no literal "binding of Satan" to be thought of at all: what happens, happens not to Satan but to the saints, and is only represented as

whole time between the First and Second Coming of the Lord" (Milligan: Com. in Schaff's *Pop. Com. on N. T.* on xi. 2, pp. 93, 94, where there is a clear and full statement). For the equivalent phrase "a little time" the references at the head of this note will suffice.

* Cf. Lee (*Speaker's Com.* on xx. 2, p. 792): "That the period of a '*thousand years*' is to be taken figuratively is in accordance with such texts as Ps. xc. 4, ... or 2 Peter iii. 8 . . . . A space of time absolutely *long* is denoted. . . . . A very great though not a countless number is signified. . . . . We are to understand a long though finite duration, beginning from the First Advent of Christ (1 Cor. xv. 24, 25)."

happening to Satan for the purposes of the symbolical picture. What actually happens is that the saints described are removed from the sphere of Satan's assaults. The saints described are free from all access of Satan—he is bound with respect to them: outside of their charmed circle his horrid work goes on. This is indicated, indeed, in the very employment of the two symbols "a thousand years" and "a little time." A "thousand years" is the symbol of heavenly completeness and blessedness; the "little time" of earthly turmoil and evil. Those in the "thousand years" are safe from Satan's assaults: those outside the thousand years are still enduring his attacks. And therefore he, though with respect to those in the thousand years bound, is not destroyed; and the vision accordingly requires to close with an account of his complete destruction, and of course this also must needs be presented in the narrative form of a release of Satan, the gathering of his hosts and their destruction from above.

We may perhaps profitably advert to some of the traits that go to show that it is the children of God gathered in Paradise that are in view in the description of the rest and security that occupies the central section of the vision (vers. 4–6). We are told that the seer saw "thrones, and those that sat upon them, and judgment was given to them." Our Lord, we will remember, is uniformly represented as having been given a Messianic kingship in reward for His redemptive death, in order that He might carry out His mediatorial work to the end.* Those who, being His, go away from the body and home to the Lord, are accordingly conceived by the seer as ascending the throne with Him to share His kingship—not forever, however, but for a thousand years, *i.e.*, for the Messianic period. Then, when the last enemy has been conquered and He restores the kingdom to the Father,† their co-reign with Him ceases, because His Messianic kingdom itself ceases. These reigning saints, now, are described as "souls"—a term which carries us back irresistibly to vi. 9, where we read of "the souls of them that had been slain for the Word of God resting underneath the altar," a passage of which the present is an expanded version. Similarly here, too, we are told that these souls are "of them that had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the Word of God, and such as worshipped not the beast, neither his image and received not the mark upon their forehead and upon their hand." The description in the symbol is drawn from the fate of martyrs; but it

* *e.g.*, Phil. ii. 10.

† 1 Cor. xv. 54.

is not literal martyrs that are meant in the thing symbolized. To the seer all of Christ's saints are martyrs of the world. "For in the eyes of John," as has been well said, "all the disciples of a martyred Lord are martyrs": "Christ's Church is a martyr Church, she dies in her Master's service and for the world's good."* These all, dying in Christ, die not but live—for Christ is not Lord, any more than God is God, of the dead but the living. We must catch here the idea that pervades the whole of Jewish thought—inculcated as it is with the most constant iteration by the whole Old Testament revelation—that death is the penalty of sin and that restoration from death, that is resurrection, is involved, therefore, in reception into the favor of God. It is this that underlies and gives its explanation to our Lord's famous argument for the resurrection to which we have just alluded. And it is this, doubtless, that underlies also the seer's designation in our passage of the state of the souls in Paradise with their Lord, saved in principle if not in complete fruition, as "the first resurrection." "This," he says, "is the first resurrection"; and he pronounces those blessed who have part in it, and declares that over them "the second death" has no power. Subsequently he identifies "the second death" with eternal destruction (ver. 14) in the lake of fire—the symbol throughout these visions of the final state of the wicked. To say that "the second death" has no power over the saints of whom he is here speaking is to say at once that they have already been subjected to the "first death," which can mean only that they have suffered bodily death, and that they are "saved souls" with their life hidden with Christ in God. That is to say, they are the blessed dead—the dwellers in the "intermediate state." The "first resurrection" is here, therefore, the symbolical description of what has befallen those who while dead yet live in the Lord; and it is set in contrast with the "second resurrection," which must mean the restoration of the bodily life. As partakers of this "first resurrection" they are set in contrast with "the rest of the dead"—who were to "live not" until "the thousand years should be finished." This phrase advertises us once more that those of whom the seer speaks are themselves in a sense "dead," and as they are declared repeatedly to be *living*—living and reigning with Christ—this cannot refer to spiritual death, but must find its reference to bodily death. Though dead, therefore, in this bodily sense, they were yet alive—alive in the paradise of God with Christ. The rest of the

* Milligan, *The Expositor's Bible: the Book of Revelation*, pp. 182, 344. Cf. his beautiful words in Schaff's *Popular Commentary, The Revelation, in loc.* IV, p. 1426.

dead, on the other hand—those not alive with Christ—wait for the end to live again: they are in every sense dead—already suffering the penalty of sin and to be restored to even bodily life only to be plunged into the terrible "second death."

It seems scarcely possible to read over these three verses, however cursorily, without meeting thus with constant reminders that the peace and security pictured is the peace and security of the blessed dead, seated in the heavenly places, in their Lord, on the throne of the universe in company with Him. Any hesitancy we may feel to adopt this view appears to arise chiefly from the difficulty we naturally experience in reading this apparently historical narrative as a descriptive picture of a state—in translating, so to speak, the dynamic language of narrative into the static language of description. Does not the very term "a thousand years" suggest the lapse of time? And must we not, therefore, interpret what is represented as occurring before and after this thousand years as historical precedents and subsequents to it? Natural as this feeling is, we are persuaded it is grounded only on a certain not unnatural incapacity to enter fully into the seer's method and to give ourselves entirely to his guidance. If he elected to represent a state of completeness and perfection by a symbol which suggested lapse of time when taken in its literal meaning, he had no choice but to represent what was outside this state as *before* or *after:* that belonged to the very vehicle of representation. Now it is quite certain that the number 1000 represents in Bible symbolism absolute perfection and completeness; and that the symbolism of the Bible includes also the use of a period of time in order to express the idea of greatness, in connection with thoroughness and completeness.* It can scarcely be necessary to insist here afresh on the symbolical use of numbers in the Apocalypse and the necessity consequently laid upon the interpreter to treat them consistently not merely as symbols but as symbols embodying definite ideas. They constitute a language, and like any other language they are misleading unless intended and read as expressions of definite ideas. When the seer says seven or four or three or ten, he does not name these numbers at random but expresses by each a specific notion. The sacred number seven in combination with the equally sacred number three forms the number of holy perfection ten, and when this ten is cubed into a thousand the seer has said all he could say to convey to our minds the idea of absolute completeness. It is of more importance doubtless, how-

* Dr. Milligan has shown this very convincingly.

ever, to illustrate the use of time-periods to convey the idea of completeness. Ezek. xxxix. 9 provides an instance. There the completeness of the conquest of Israel over its enemies is expressed by saying that seven years shall be consumed in the burning up of the débris of battle: they "shall go forth," we read, "and shall make fires of the weapons and burn them, both the shields and the bucklers, the bows and the arrows, and the hand-staves and the spears, and they shall *make fires of them seven years.*" It were absurd to suppose that it is intended that the fires shall actually endure seven years. We have here only a hyperbole to indicate the greatness of the mass to be consumed and the completeness of the consumption. A somewhat similar employment of the time-phrase to express the idea of greatness is found in the twelfth verse of the same chapter, where, after the defeat of Gog "and all his multitude," it is said, "And seven months shall the children of Israel be burying of them that they may cleanse the land." That is to say, the multitude of the dead is so great that by way of hyperbole their burial is said to consume seven months. The number seven employed by Ezekiel in these passages is replaced by the number a thousand in our present passage, with the effect of greatly enhancing the idea of greatness and of completeness conveyed. When the saints are said to live and reign with Christ a thousand years the idea intended is that of inconceivable exaltation, security and blessedness—a completeness of exaltation, security and blessedness beyond expression by ordinary language.

We can scarcely go the length of Dr. Milligan, nevertheless, and say that the time-element is wholly excluded from our passage. After all it is the intermediate state that is portrayed and the intermediate state has duration. But it is within the limits of sobriety to say that the time-element retires into the background and the stress is laid on the greatness and completeness of the security portrayed. This is, however, portrayed under a time-symbol: and the point now is that, this being so, the very necessity of the symbolism imposed on the writer the representation of the other elements of the symbol also by time-expressions. Accordingly in the picture which he draws for us the vision of the security of the saints is preceded and followed by scenes represented as occurring before and after it, but to be read as occurring merely outside it. The chaining of Satan is not in the event a preliminary transaction, on which the security of the saints follows: nor is the loosing of Satan a subsequent transaction, on which the security of the saints ceases. The saints rather escape entirely beyond the reach of

Satan when they ascend to their Lord and take their seats on His throne by His side, and there they abide nevermore subject to his assaults. This is indeed suggested in the issue (ver. 9*b*), where the destruction of Satan is compassed by a fire from heaven and not through the medium of a battle with the saints. But while the saints abide in their security Satan, though thus "bound" relatively to them, is loosed relatively to the world—and that is what is meant by the statement in ver. 3*c* that "he must be loosed for a little time"—which is the symbol of the inter-adventual period, in the world; and not less in vers. 7–10. We must here look on the time-element, we repeat, as belonging wholly to the symbol and read in the interpretation space-elements in its place. The intermediate state is in one word conceived of not out of relation to the "world," but as, so to speak, a safe haven of retreat in the midst of the world: the world is around it, and there Satan still works and deceives, but he who escapes through the one door of "beheading" for Christ's sake, rises not only to security but to a kingdom.

As we scrutinize the text closely with this scheme of interpretation in mind, the apparent difficulties that stand in its path give way one after another. One clause alone seems so recalcitrant as not to lend itself readily to the proposed interpretation. This occurs in the middle of verse 3. There it is affirmed that Satan is chained "that he should deceive the nations no more." Under Dr. Milligan's interpretation of the thousand years' security, which he applies not to the saints in glory with their Lord—the intermediate state—but to the saints in conflict on earth—the militant state—this clause seems no doubt hopeless. But if we are to understand that it is the intermediate state that is portrayed, the difficulty which it presents does not seem to be insuperable. In its general meaning the clause indeed is only the extreme point of the temporal-machinery in which the vision is cast. If what is *spacially* distinct, so to speak, in the reality, is to be represented in the figure as *temporally* distinct, there seems no way in which it can be done except by saying that Satan is first bound so as not to act, in order that he may be afterward loosed so as to act. The only real difficulty lies in the word "nations." Should we not expect "saints" instead—for is it not merely with reference to the saints that Satan is supposed to be bound? And is not the word "nations" the standing denomination in the Apocalypse of precisely the anti-Christian hosts? The only solution that readily suggests itself turns on the supposition that the word "nations" may be used here in its wider inclusive sense, and not of "those without" in contrast

with God's people. The term "world" occurs in this double sense, and there seems no reason why "nations" should not also, especially since it is continually understood that the "nations" include God's people in the making (xxii. 2). Possibly little more is intended to be conveyed by the phrase in verse 3 than "to bring out and express that aspect of Satan by which he is specially distinguished in the Apocalypse"—that is to say, to declare simply that "Satan the deceiver" was bound:* and what is more than this belongs to the drapery of the symbolism. In ver. 8 it appears to have a slightly different turn given it. There is a special propriety in its suggesting in this context "those without" indeed, but those without not so much the circle of Christ's people in general as Christ's people as gathered into the secure haven of the intermediate state. In a word, it seems that we may understand the "nations" here, not of the anti-Christian world in contrast with the Christian, but of the world on earth in contrast with the saints gathered in Paradise. As such the "nations" may include Christians also, but Christians not yet departed to their security—nay their monarchy—with their Lord. If these suggestions be allowed, something will certainly be gained towards a suitable interpretation of the clause. But it cannot be pretended that a real solution of its difficulties has been offered in any case; it remains a dark spot in an otherwise lucid paragraph and must be left for subsequent study to explain.

If the interpretation we have urged be adopted this vision, therefore, as a whole (xx. 1–20), in sharp contrast with the preceding one (xix. 11–21), which pictured the strife of God's people in the world, brings before us the spectacle of the peace of God's saints gathered in heaven. It, too, embraces the whole inter-adventual period, but that period as passed in the security and glory of the intermediate state. This is set forth, however, not out of relation to the militant Church on earth, but as, so to speak, its other side. It is as if the seer had said, Look on this picture and on that: neither alone, but the two in combination supply the true picture of the course of events between the first and second advents. The Church toiling and struggling here below is but half the story: the Church gathering above is the other half. And both speed them to the end. For the one it is a period of conflict, though of a conflict advancing to victory. For the other it is a period of restful security, nay of royal ruling. It is the conjunction of the two that consti-

* We are quoting here from Dr. Milligan's *Baird Lectures*, first ed., pp. 223–5 note, which seems to us more suggestive than the note in *The Expositor's Bible* volume, pp. 350–351.

tutes this inter-adventual period; and, together, they pass onward to the end:

> "Blesséd that flock safe penned in Paradise;
> Blesséd this flock which tramps in weary ways;
> All form one flock, God's flock; all yield Him praise
> By joy or pain, still tending towards the prize."

Accordingly this vision is followed by a third, in which is depicted the last judgment, in which all—both in earth and heaven—partake. That this is the *general* judgment seems to be obvious on the face of it. Those whom it concerns are described as "the dead, both great and small," which seems to be an inclusive designation. That it is not merely the wicked who are summoned to it appears from the fact that not only the "book of deeds," but also the "book of life" is employed in it, and it is only those whose names are not found written in the book of life that are cast into the lake of fire—whence it seems to follow that some are present whose names are written in the "book of life." The destruction of "death and Hades" does not imply that the judgment is over the enemies of God only, but merely that hereafter, as Paul, too, says, death shall be no more. There is, no doubt, the "second death," but this is the lake of fire, that is to say, the eternal torment. It is, thus, the great final assize that is here presented to our contemplation: implying the general resurrection and preparing the entrance into eternal destiny. The former fulfills the proleptic declaration in verse 5 that "the rest of the dead lived not until the thousand years should be finished": now they are finished and "the second resurrection," in which all—not Christ's people only—share, takes place: and accordingly they, too, are, in this reference, classed among "the dead" (ver. 12). The latter is adverted to, so far as the wicked are concerned, with the brevity consonant with this culminating part of the Apocalypse, in the concluding verse of the chapter: "And if any was not found written in the book of life, he was cast into the lake of fire." With respect to the destiny of God's saints, the things the seer has to say of them require new visions.

The scene, therefore, shifts at once and a new vision is presented to us (xxi. 1–8). It is the vision of the consummated kingdom of God. There is a new heaven and a new earth: and the new Jerusalem, the city of God, descends from heaven: and God makes His dwelling in its midst: and the happy inheritance of the saints is exhibited to us in all its richness and blessedness. To enhance the value and desirableness of this picture of holy bliss destined for

God's people it is set between two declarations of the fate of the wicked (xx. 15, xxi. 8).

Nor is this all. For this vision is followed immediately by a symbolical description of the glorified people of God under the similitude of a city (xxi. 9–xxii. 5). It is the bride, the wife of the Lamb (ver. 9) that is depicted: and she is described as a perfect and glorious city in which the Lord makes His abode, and which He Himself supplies with all that it can need. This is not a picture of heaven, be it observed: it is a picture of the heavenly estate of the Church—not merely of the ideal of the Church, but of the ideal of the Church as *realized*, after the turmoil of earth and the secluded waiting in Paradise alike are over. We quite agree with Dr. Milligan then when, in his latest exposition, he expounds the vision as a "detailed account of the true Church under the figure of a city," and remarks that this "city is really a figure, not of a place but of a people: it is not the final home of the redeemed: it is the redeemed themselves." But we cannot go with him when he adds that it is "essentially a picture, not of the future, but of the present; of the ideal condition of Christ's true people, of His 'little flock' in every age."* True, it may be that "every blessing limned in upon this canvas is *in principle* the believer's now," but the realization of these blessings for the Church, as a whole, is surely reserved until the time when that Church shall at length be presented to its Lord "a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but holy and without blemish." "And I saw," said the seer, when he was contemplating the consummating glory (xxi. 2), "the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband." But now, gazing in vision on the consummated glory, he has even more to show us. "Come hither," the angel said to him (xxi. 9), and "I will show thee the bride, *the Lamb's wife*." The marriage has now taken place, it is no longer the bride preparing for her husband, or even the bride adorned for her husband: it is the bride, "*the Lamb's wife*." "The Church," says Dr. Milligan himself in an earlier and in this point, we believe, a better exposition, "is not only espoused *but married to her Lord*." Gazing on the beautiful traits limned for us, we see not indeed what we are, but what we shall be, and who can wonder if we cry with the sweet singer, Would God we were there!

* *Expositor's Bible* volume on *The Book of Revelation* (1889), pp. 164, 368, 373. In his earlier *Commentary* in Dr. Schaff's *Popular Com. on the N. T.*, Dr. Milligan had interpreted this vision of the consummated Church—though not of the Church so much as of its "eternal home," *i.e.*, heaven.

It is not our purpose to go into a detailed exegesis of these visions. We content ourselves with this mere suggestion of their essential contents, satisfied to draw out from them merely the great features of the eschatology of the Apocalypse, culminating as it does in this section in which is summed up its entire teaching. So far as serves this purpose, we venture to hope that the exposition will commend itself as reasonable: and it will be wise not to lose ourselves in doubtful details of exegesis which might cloud the light that shines on the more general outline. Our main hesitation turns upon the distribution of the several visions. As we have read the section, we have separated it into only five visions. The whole structure of the Apocalypse is, however, dominated by the number seven. With a prologue and an epilogue the book is compounded of seven parallel and yet climactically wrought-out main sections. Four of these are formally subdivided into seven subsections each. It seems probable that this sevenfold structure runs through the remaining sections also, although it is not formally announced in them, and is left, therefore, for the reader to trace. On this ground we should expect the section now engaging our attention—xix. 11–xxii. 5—to offer us a series of seven visions. But only five have been signalized by us. The suspicion lies close that we have in subdividing the section into its constituent visions missed two of its division lines. We think it very likely we have done so, but we have not been able to put our finger on obvious lines of cleavage, and have preferred to let the material fall apart where it naturally falls apart and to attempt no artificial dissecting. Possibly the points of separation may present themselves more clearly to others. In any event, it seems probable that if two separate visions have been confused by us into one, it is because they are very closely related visions, from one of which to the other there is rather progress than transition. In that very probable case the main lines of exposition would not be affected: and the purpose of our present enterprise would be secured as fully as if we had succeeded in separating between them.

What, then, is the eschatological outline we have gained from a study of this section? Briefly stated it is as follows. Our Lord Jesus Christ came to conquer the world to Himself, and this He does with a thoroughness and completeness which seems to go beyond even the intimations of Romans xi and 1 Cor. xv. Meanwhile, as the conquest of the world is going on below, the saints who die in the Lord are gathered in Paradise to reign with their Lord, who is also Lord of all, and who is from His throne directing

the conquest of the world. When the victory is completely won there supervenes the last judgment and the final destruction of the wicked. At once there is a new heaven and a new earth and the consummation of the glory of the Church. And this Church abides forever (xxii. 5), in perfection of holiness and blessedness. In bare outline that is what our section teaches. It will be noted at once that it is precisely the teaching of the didactic epistles of Paul and of the whole New Testament with him. No attempts to harmonize the several types of teaching are necessary, therefore, for their entire harmony lies on the surface. John knows no more of two resurrections—of the saints and of the wicked—than does Paul: and the whole theory of an intervening millennium—and indeed of a millennium of any kind on earth—goes up in smoke. We are forced, indeed, to add our assent to Klieforth's conclusion, that "the doctrine of a thousand-year kingdom has no foundation in the prophecies of the New Testament, and is therefore not a dogma but merely a hypothesis lacking all Biblical ground."* The millennium of the Apocalypse is the blessedness of the saints who have gone away from the body to be at home with the Lord.

But this conclusion obviously does not carry with it the denial that a "golden age" yet lies before the Church, if we may use this designation in a purely spiritual sense. As emphatically as Paul, John teaches that the earthly history of the Church is not a history merely of conflict with evil, but of conquest over evil: and even more richly than Paul John teaches that this conquest will be decisive and complete. The whole meaning of the vision of xix. 11–21 is that Christ Jesus comes forth not to war merely but to victory; and every detail of the picture is laid in with a view precisely to emphasizing the thoroughness of this victory. The Gospel of Christ is, John being witness, completely to conquer the world. He says nothing, any more than Paul does, of the period of the endurance of this conquered world. Whether the last judgment and the consummated kingdom are to follow immediately upon its conquest—his visions are as silent as Paul's teaching. But just on that account the possibility of an extended duration for the conquered earth lies open: and in any event a progressively advancing conquest of the earth by Christ's Gospel implies a coming age deserving at least the relative name of golden. Perhaps a distinction may be made between a converted earth and a sanctified earth: such a distinction seems certainly more accordant with the tone of these visions than that more commonly suggested between ..

* *Christl. Eschatol.*, 1886, p. 188.

witnessed-to earth and a converted earth. The Gospel assuredly must be preached to the whole world as a witness, before the Lord comes. These visions seem to go farther and to teach that the earth—the whole world—must be won to Christ before He comes: and that it is precisely this conquest of it that He is accomplishing during the progress of this inter-adventual period.

Whether they go so far as to say that this winning of the world implies the complete elimination of evil from it may be more doubtful. In favor of the one view is the tremendous emphasis laid on the overthrow of all Christ's enemies, which must mean precisely his spiritual opponents—all that militates against the perfection of His rule over the hearts of men. In favor of the other is the analogy of the individual life, in which complete sanctification lags behind after the life has been in principle won to God. Perhaps it may even be said that a perfect life is not to be thought possible for sin-born men in the conditions of this sin-cursed world. Perhaps it may be affirmed that what is thus true of each individual must be true of the congeries of these individuals which we call the world. Perhaps it may be maintained on such grounds as these that as the perfecting of the individual waits for the next life, so the perfecting of the world must wait until the conquest is over—the last assize is held—and the New Jerusalem descends from heaven. In a word, that the perfected world—with all that means—is not to be discovered at xix. 21, but at xxi. 1, and that the description of it is to be read therefore in xxi. 9–xxii. 5, and at no previous point. No doubt there is an element of speculation in such suppositions, and we may well be content to leave the text to teach its own lessons, without additions from us. These lessons, however, at least include as much as this: that there is a "golden age" before the Church—at least an age relatively golden gradually ripening to higher and higher glories as the Church more and more fully conquers the world and all the evil of the world; and ultimately an age absolutely golden when the perfected Church is filled with the glory of the Lord in the new earth and under the new heavens. All the aspirations of the prophets, all the dreams of the seers, can surely find satisfaction in this great vision.

Meanwhile, the saints of God do not need to await the consummation of the ages before they enter into the joy of their Lord. Even "in this world" they receive their reward. The seer, in his vision, sees their accumulated hosts. But through all the years they are gathering,—

"They are flocking from the East
And the West,
They are flocking from the North
And the South,
Every moment setting forth,
* * * * * *
Palm in hand, and praise in mouth,
They are flocking up the path
To their rest."

This their "rest" is the "Millennium" of the Apocalypse.

Princeton. B. B. WARFIELD.

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